



# News Release

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## **Risks of Hantavirus rises this time of year**

*Preventing infestations and proper cleaning techniques reduce risk of illness*

**OLYMPIA** — Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome can occur during any month, but spring and summer present more opportunities for exposure. Cleaning cabins, outbuildings and campers, and spending more time outdoors puts people in contact with deer mice.

“Each year our state has a few cases of Hantavirus,” said Kathy Lofy, State Health Officer at the Department of Health. “While cases are rare, they often have tragic consequences. There are important steps people can take to lower the risk of contracting this dangerous illness.”

In Washington, we typically see one to three cases of [Hantavirus](#) each year. This severe respiratory disease is caused by inhaling air contaminated with the virus. People are often exposed when rodent droppings, urine, or nesting materials are stirred up when sweeping or cleaning. Hantavirus begins with flu-like symptoms, such as fever, muscle aches, fatigue, and headaches. As it worsens, shortness of breath is caused by fluid filling up the lungs. About 38 percent of hantavirus patients die.

The best way to prevent a rodent infestation is to remove their sources of food, water and shelter. Store pet and people food, as well as bird and livestock feed, indoors in containers with tight fitting lids. Mice can squeeze through openings as small as a quarter of an inch. Sealing all gaps and holes into buildings can keep them out. Also, avoid stirring up rodent nests, droppings, or other rodent-contaminated materials into the air. Special precautions should be used for cleaning homes or buildings with heavy rodent infestations. Homeowners should consider hiring a professional for such areas. People can follow [other simple steps](#) listed on our website to prevent exposure to rodent carried diseases. The Department of Health also has [tips on how to properly clean up](#) a rodent-contaminated area.

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